

BALTIMORE SUN OP ED

Cargo transfer facility well worth state's investment

Proposed intermodal transportation facility will keep Maryland ahead of the competition

By Harry Halpert

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Our state stands at the brink of a remarkable economic opportunity — and so do the tens of thousands of people whose jobs are related to the Port of Baltimore.

In less than three years, an expanded Panama Canal is scheduled to open, permitting significantly larger cargo ships to pass through and come up the East Coast.

And, thanks to the foresight of Gov. Martin O'Malley and his team at the Maryland Department of Transportation, our state will be ready as soon as next August, when dredging is completed on a deeper, 50-foot channel into the port. Baltimore will be one of only two East Coast ports prepared to accommodate these massive ships and their huge commercial import-and-export trade.

But to ensure Maryland stays ahead of our competition, we must also upgrade how we transport cargo to and from our port. Our state has to find a way to increase the use of double-stacked trains and create a more efficient means of rail transportation from the Port of Baltimore to cities across the Midwest. Maryland's effort is part of an approximately \$850 million, public-private initiative known as the National Gateway, involving the federal government, six states and Washington, D.C.

Ensuring that Maryland can join this National Gateway project includes moving forward on a key construction project: the development of a "Baltimore-Washington Rail Intermodal Facility" somewhere along the rail corridor between Baltimore and Washington. The new intermodal facility would allow containers to and from ships in the port to be transported to this location and quickly transferred to double-stacked trains, connecting our state to a wide array of new markets in an efficient manner.

Because the facility offers many economic and environmental benefits for the state, Maryland has agreed to contribute up to \$75 million to this planned \$150 million facility, with CSX paying the rest. The state has indicated it intends to pursue federal funding to offset its cost.

When this facility is up and running, economists estimate that the result will include more than \$450 million in logistics cost savings for Maryland companies that rely on the port — the kind of savings that allows for both lower prices for consumers and long-term investment in new jobs.

The work is now in its early stages, as the Maryland Department of Transportation and CSX are beginning a federal process of evaluating potential locations for this new facility in Howard County, Anne Arundel County and Prince George's County.

As this federal process moves forward, it's critical that the broad economic benefits for our state receive strong consideration in choosing the best location for the project.

Those benefits include:

- More than 200 new jobs during construction and approximately 7,200 jobs during the first 20 years of the facility's operation.
- Approximately \$8.8 billion in cumulative economic benefits by 2034, and nearly \$400 million in tax revenues for state and local government.
- Cleaner and less-congested roads, as the expanded use of rail transportation will reduce long-haul truck traffic and cut the emission of greenhouse gases.

The facility itself will operate in a clean fashion, relying on electric, zero-emission cranes and technology designed to reduce truck idling time.

A little more than a year ago, when Governor O'Malley was running for re-election, one of his first issue-focused television advertisements discussed the port and its economic potential. Talking about the expansion of the port, the ad promised that Governor O'Malley was "making Maryland more competitive in the world economy."

Both Governor O'Malley and President Barack Obama have spoken often about improving competitiveness through smart investments in infrastructure. This is exactly that kind of project.

The development of the intermodal facility is a key part of that port expansion and a long-term economic growth opportunity for Maryland. As a state, we cannot afford to let this opportunity sail away.

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